Hi, just a reminder that you're receiving this email because you have expressed an interest in the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ. Don't forget to add clwaldron@secucc.org to your address book so we'll be sure to land in your inbox!

You may unsubscribe if you no longer wish to receive our emails.

"I DO!" - UCC supports relgious freedom by challenging law in North Carolina
From Rev. June Boutwell, Designated Conference Minister

Dear Friends in Christ,
Imagine that you are a pastor and one day, a couple comes to you and asks you to marry them; you counsel with them and agree. The next day, another couple comes to you and asks the same of you, and state law prohibits you from agreeing to conduct their religious ceremony. Why should the state control a minister's pastoral decisions?

Or imagine that you are a minister making an emergency pastoral visit in a hospital. You arrive at the ER and learn that one member of this couple is dying due to injuries from an accident. His partner asks you to perform the marriage that was planned for two months hence. She pleads with you. Your pastoral heart and your conscience require you to offer this pastoral service. But state law not only prohibits you from conducting the marriage service without a license, but also will impose potentially large fines and a jail sentence of up to 120 days if you do.

In North Carolina, this is the reality for clergy. State laws have infringed deeply on the free exercise of religion. A pastor who chooses to perform a religious marriage for an elderly couple who does not want the state involved in their relationship at this stage of life-but want the affirmation of God and the Church-is prohibited from doing so. A pastor who is asked by members of his or her church to perform a same-gender religious marriage service will suffer retribution from the state.

On April 28, 2014 , the General Synod of the United Church of Christ filed suit in federal court in Charlotte, North Carolina contesting the constitutionality of that state's laws on marriage. These laws prohibit a clergyperson from performing a marriage without a license having been issued by the county in which the ceremony is to be performed. The basis for the

Synod's suit is that these laws constitute an infringement of our constitutional rights of freedom of religion.

For us, as one of the founding religious traditions of this nation, the principle of free exercise of religion is a paramount value. Because we are not a hierarchical church, the freedom of every clergyperson to conduct the rites and sacraments of the Church according to the dictates of conscience is essential to our identity and our faith practice. These laws mean that a pastor cannot perform a service of religious marriage under the circumstances described above.

No matter what one believes about urgent or elder religious marriage or same gender religious marriage, the fundamental breach of free exercise of religion is what is at stake here. We cannot afford to allow this law to stand. Once government is allowed to dictate what we - or any other faith tradition - may or may not do in the practice of our faith, then we are truly on a slippery slope. This is where we take our stand. We do so not only because it affects our clergy in North Carolina so profoundly, but because we will always defend the free exercise of religion - anyone's religion.

I believe this is a very important step for the UCC to take in defense of the freedoms we hold dear. As far as we know, this is the first time a religious entity has sued on the grounds that these laws violate First Amendment rights, so we are breaking new ground. But it is ground that you and I need to have broken or our pastoral ministries right here in Southeast Conference (which includes pastors in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee) could suffer the same infringement at some future time.

I encourage you to visit www.ucc.org/ido to learn more about this lawsuit and the reasons for it. It is important that we all understand the basis in law for this suit, and the basis in conscience as well.

Southern Hospitality and Holy Week
A Message from Rev. June Boutwell, Designated Conference Minister

I am so grateful for the true Southern hospitality that y'all have offered in my two months in the Southeast Conference. So many folks have offered meals and fellowship, invitations to be present with churches for Sunday worship, special events, and celebrations in the life of congregations around the Conference.

I continue to work at getting acquainted with people, places, and processes. Significant meetings in April included the PATHWAYS Advisory Council and the Board of Directors. I continue to be impressed and humbled by the dedicated, knowledgeable, faithful, and fun folks that make this Conference such a special place to be and such a lively ministry. I also attended the two Members in Discernment Committee meetings, and appreciated the opportunity to meet those who are in discernment about authorized ministry and seeking their vocational path with the help of the Committee members and their mentors and, of course, the Holy Spirit.

Other work during the month included working with the Nominating Committee and further planning with staff and Piedmont

Other work during the month included working with the Nominating Committee and further planning with staff and Piedmont College for Annual Meeting. The Board of Directors approved the draft schedule and pricing for Annual Meeting at their April 26 meeting so registration packets should be out soon. I am very excited about the energy and possibilities of our time together. I hope that folks will make it a priority to join with each other to experience this special time in the life of Southeast Conference.

As I write this I am in the Hartfield Jackson Airport after finishing two days of meetings with the Southern Region Taskforce (the group of Southeast, South Central, Southern, and Florida Conference ministers and leaders) around common ministries and common interests as we look to see who we are as the UCC in the South. I am awaiting a flight to New York City to meet with representatives of the Pension Boards. The work of the Annuitant visitors in this Conference and emergency pastoral assistance out of our Christmas Fund offerings are both parts of the way that the Pension Boards are present with ministry in our midst. I am grateful for the Insurance Boards and agents' response to the bad weather last month and for Disaster Response Ministries who have already contacted the Conference to inquire about any churches affected by the storms over the last weekend in April. It is comforting and reassuring to know that others are surrounding our people and ministries with faithful care.

Lastly, I want to share the renewal of my own spirit and ministry as I joined with several communities during Holy Week.

Click here to read the rest of Rev. June's message highlighting Holy Week in the SEC

CONFERENCE NEWS

Board of Directors Meet

The Southeast Conference Board of Directors met on April 26.

One of the more significant items of discussion was the local giving patterns for Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM). These gifts provide the funds necessary for the operations of the Conference and provide our contribution to the work of the national setting of the United Church of Christ. Traditionally funds are not remitted until the last quarter of the year which is placing strain on the everyday operations of the Conference. Several strategies were discussed about how to encourage churches to give monthly or quarterly to even out the cash flow through the year. This will be lifted up at Annual Meeting and by Conference staff as they communicate with churches.

Grant applications for funds from the Capital Campaign are in the final review stage and will be made available to churches and ministries this summer for the 2014 funding period.

Rev. Sarah Kim presented the PATHWAYS report with guest and PATHWAYS Advisory Committee member, Lou Kavar. The need for doing market research and analysis and implementing an effective marketing plan was discussed.

The Board heard a report from the nominations

committee and approved the draft schedule and pricing for Annual Meeting.

Generosity Corner

GOD'S VISION: TESTIMONY

TESTIMONY! is the national UCC campaign to raise $1 million dollar to fund new UCC congregations that demonstrate the possibility of growth and vitality. 100 percent of the proceeds of Testimony! will be funneled into planting new churches and bringing renewal to current UCC congregations.
Did you know?

- Since 2006, more than 250 new UCC congregations have opened their doors, establishing progress-justice minded faith communities across the United States. That equals more new congregations than at any other time since the 1960s.
- Growth in the UCC, will be centered especially in the South and the West where we are poised to engage and invite existing congregations that share our values to consider affiliating with the UCC.
- Launched in July 2013, the first six months netted an impressive groundswell of support from more than 165 donors, who have contributed nearly $280,000 to date.
- Local Church Ministries budgets $600,000 annually for direct and in-kind support of new congregations, but it is not sufficient.
- OUR CONFERENCE has been a leader in church starts in the past five years. Planting churches that

Emmanuel UCC in Greenville SC was approved as a New Church Start and the Board was updated on a funding request for Rush Memorial Congregational UCC to apply for federal and state National Historic Site status.

The Board also approved a new copier lease at a cost savings over the next four years as compared to current costs.

AROUND the CONFERENCE

New ONA Churches in the SEC
by Michael Stroud

In the Southeast, where gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered often feel alone and marginalized, a revolution is underway. But it is a quite peaceful one: Christian communities within our Southeast Conference of the UCC are declaring an alternative to the seemingly indigenous homophobia of traditional Southern religion. And nowhere has the growth of the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns' "Open and Affirming" program taken hold so strongly lately than the state of Alabama!

Birmingham's Pilgrim Church was the first Alabama UCC to adopt the platform, all the way back in 2001. But it would be six more years before one of its neighbors in town, Beloved Community Church, did the same. Elsewhere in the Conference's territory, 13 congregations in other states had already done so by then, with Tennessee alone having seven of them. There was, needless to say, a lot a catching up to do!
However, 2014 has seen Alabama's total of ONA churches more than double in the space of just eight weeks! First, in February, Open Table UCC in Mobile was recognized for the vote it had taken as a new church start after its 2010 founding (Open Table was granted full UCC membership in April 2013). Then, two weeks after Mobile, another of our new and thriving churches, Covenant Community UCC in Center Point (outside Birmingham), gained recognition for what pastor J. R. Finney said had always been the heart of its life: a welcome to all, regardless of condition and especially sexual orientation. Finally, in April, one of the Conference's "heritage" churches (and stalwart pillars) made the move after about a year and a half of study and discussion: United Church of Huntsville.

Click here to continue reading the article at SECUCC.org

Pulpit Supply Needed

Oak Grove Congregational Christian Church is seeking a ministers for long-term pulpit supply and pastoral care.

This rural community is located about an hour and a half from south Atlanta near the resort of Callaway Gardens. Weekly Sunday service, visitation of the sick and

have received grants from the National UCC, but could use more support.

Says Rev. J. Bennett Guess, executive minister of Local Church Ministries, "There was a noticeable gap in our grant asking process because, until TESTIMONY! came about, all funding for a new church project ended after an initial 3 year grant cycle, no matter how successful or viable the church had proven itself to be." Guess also says, "This is a way to bring wood where there is FIRE, and to do so in a way that ensures individual and congregational donors are investing places with proven promise for sustainability and growth."
So then, what are the goals for the Southeast Conference? Our conference has pledged to raise $8,000 or more toward the goal. Already, $2,000 has been raised through Board members and Conference staff donations. We now opening up the ask to local churches and individuals throughout the conference. Please consider a $100 or more donation today. Thank you for your continued generosity to the United Church of Christ. If you have questions, please contact Debbie Spearman, Generosity Coordinator, dspearman@secucc.org

To donate to TESTIMONY! today, click on the donate button. On the donate page specify "Other donations", and type "TESTIMONY!" into the blank.

Donate

Annual Meeting

SHARE YOUR GOOD NEWS!

As we share our stories with one another when we gather at Piedmont College, each church is asked to prepare a poster size foam core display board that shares the Good News of your congregation. This good news may be an ongoing mission project or a special event or a collection of the ways you do worship, outreach, and justice ministries. All the posters will be displayed throughout the event so we can share with one another how we follow Christ and how the Holy Spirit is leading us as a presence for blessing in this world.

If you have a workshop that you would like to present or wish to reserve an exhibit space, please contact Debbie Spearman at dspearman@secucc.org or at 404-607-1993. Email is preferred.

Authorized Ministers are invited to gather on June 19 for a special time of sharing and story with Rev. Linda Jaramillo, Rev. Felix Villanueva, and storyteller Valerie

bereaved, and Bible study are included in the job description. If interested, please contact Rev. June Boutwell in the Southeast Conference office at jboutwell@sec.org or 404-607-1993.

The United Church of Christ Musicians National Network (UCCMNN) is pleased to announce their 2014 conference, "Make a Joyful Noise" featuring John Bell and Ruth Elaine Schram at Congregational United Church of Christ in Greensboro, North Carolina from July 10-13, 2014. Complete information is available at www.UCCMNN.com, including presenters, workshops, host church and conference hotel, news about two pre-conference offerings, and a link to registration. The UCCMNN is sponsored by Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ. Membership is free and open to anyone interested in the worship life of the local church.

Caring Connections Conference
May 16, 2014 Lipscomb Univeristy, Nashville Tenn.

Hear distinguished professionals speaking on such topics as mental health, ministry, pastoral care, spiritual formation and more.

You'll leave this conference better equipped to care for those you serve with new ideas, stronger skills and resources that are available to you and your company, practice or ministry.

AGAPE's Counselor Training Institute and Lipscomb's Department of Psychology and Counseling are partnering together to present this unique, one-day conference.

To register or for more information go to www.caringconnectionsconference.org

or email info@caringconnectionsconference.org.

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Registration packets will be mailed to each church and pastor in early May and be available on-line at www.secucc.org.

National UCC

Disaster Ministries and Recent Tornados

On April 28, tornados cut through a large swath of the United States, leaving a trail of devastation through Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee. So far 34 people have been reported dead, with hundreds more injured. United Church of Christ Disaster Ministries are working to help meet the needs of those who have been most affected. Currently we are unaware of any UCC churches or members that have been impacted in the Southeast. If you know of any, please let us know by contacting the SEC Office so that we can help with a response. We'd also invite you to join with us in prayer for those who are affected.

You can read more about the response of Disaster Ministries on the UCC website by clicking here.

STILLSPEAKING YOUTH

Regional Youth Event this Summer

Join with other UCC youth around the south for the Regional Youth event! June 12-15, 2014 ~ hosted at Eckerd College, in St Petersburg, FL. This event is open to all 6th - 12th grade youth from the Florida, Southern, Southeast and South Central Conferences of the UCC. Our theme is "Touched by God." The early bird registration deadline is in just a couple of days!

Click here to link via Facebook

Click here for a link to information on the Florida Conference website

Click here to register!

The deadline for registration is May 15th and costs $265.

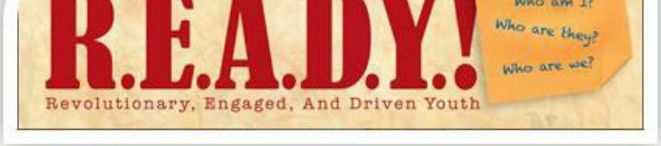
QUADRENNIAL ASSEMBLY FOR WOMEN

June 25-29, 2014 Atlanta

Every four years the Office of Disciples Women (ODW) and International Disciples Women's Ministries (IDWM) sponsor an assembly planned by and for women. In 2014, women from around the world will converge on Atlanta, Georgia for the 14th Quadrennial Assembly at the Marriott Marquis Hotel and Convention Center.

The Assembly will feature powerful speakers, original music and outstanding discovery groups. More than 2,000 women are expected to attend this awesome gathering. The hotel is large enough to hold all assembly attendees under one roof and Disciples Women will be the largest group during that week.

More than 80 discovery opportunities will be found on the official event website, www.quadrennial.org. Registration online is available now. You can download a flyer for the event here.



Join Global Ministries for a Journey!

This free online youth curriculum is one of self-discovery to broaden their view of themselves, the church, the community, and their place in the world. http://globalministries.org/ready

R.E.A.D.Y!
(Revolutionary Engaged and Driven Youth):
Session 1 Challenging stereotypes and prejudices
Session 2 Recognizing God in all religious traditions
Session 3 Discovering differences and similarities to people in different cultures
Session 4 Realizing God's mission requires a constantly evolving world view

In each session there are bible quotes (linked to the appropriate scripture passage), reflection questions, quotes for reflection, embedded videos, and exercises.

Each session could be completed in one hour with a bible passage/discussion and video/reflection question.

The materials are plentiful and flexible enough to be used in one or several sessions. The resource can also be used for adult study.

The Global Ministries Mission Education team welcomes your feedback and has provided a link at the end of Session 4.

Email: ready@ucc.org for more information.

Peace,

Tracy Carnes (UCC) and Jon Barnes (DOC)

Forward this issue

Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

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